

## **SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON MANEO MARRIAGE AND HISTORY**

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This paper examines the marriage payment system of the Maneo, a small population of hunter/foragers in the mountains and on the coast of central Seram. These exchanges are pivotal in determining the way principles of social organization are put into actual practice. Over the last thirty years, however, the quantity of payments—particularly of 16th- and 17th-century porcelain—has declined dramatically. Analysis of the effects of change sheds light on the meaning of marriage and payments. It also permits investigation of the role of marriage in shaping Maneo history.

The Maneo are a sedentary population of hunters, foragers, and sometime horticulturalists living in the mountains and on the south coast of central Seram in central Maluku. Located to the east of the Maneo are Seti-speaking communities; Manusela-speaking communities (of which the Maneo are one) are scattered to the west. There are roughly 500 Maneo residing in one of four mountain villages and in scattered small dwellings in the forest, and another 500 divided between two recently established coastal villages. They are nominally organized into more or less exogamous corporate units I will refer to (uncritically) as clans. Clan members collectively own hunting and gardening territories; they also possess rights to certain myths and genealogies. Generally, persons are recruited patrilineally. However, each individual possesses limited rights to material and nonmaterial properties belonging to his or her maternal (or paternal) clan. In addition, offspring of same-sex parents who are siblings refer to each other categorically as siblings, regardless of their clan affiliation. The whole region—Maneo, Manusela, and Seti—is loosely organized by interlocking kinship and marriage ties, and by shared history, including formal alliances and enmities.

I first travelled to the region for two months in 1989. Based on data gathered on that trip and from surveying the ethnographies of nearby

groups (e.g., Ellen 1978, McKinnon 1991, Valeri 1980, van Wouden 1968), I designed a proposal for dissertation research on changes and continuities in the Maneo marriage exchange system and on the relationship between marriage and social organization more generally. Since then, my wife and I have completed fifteen months of study (from June 1992 through August 1993) and plan to return shortly for several more months of research. In this paper, I wish to describe tentative efforts to assemble disparate field data into a coherent framework for analysis.

The first question nonspecialists ask is: Why marriage? Marriage, and the attendant set of exchanges in Maneo, create and animate a variety of important social relationships predicated upon enduring reciprocal obligations backed up by moral force. Clan recruitment is largely determined by these exchanges. If payments from the husband's side (*hahapina*) to the wife's side (*hahamana*) are complete, then offspring generally affiliate patrilocally. If not, then one or more of the children join their maternal clan and reside with maternal grandparents and uncles. The consequences of affiliating patrilocally or matrilocally are unclear. Clans are exclusive, yet each confers approximately the same privileges (the ideology of clan hierarchy notwithstanding.) The area of activity most affected by marriage exchanges is, of course, marriage itself. Payments help to delineate the range of eligible and noneligible marriage partners. For example, payments may differentiate a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage—the preferred marriage pattern—from an incestuous union, or the reverse. A person may consider a marriage incestuous if he is asked to contribute to the marriage of a classificatory sibling or son and, at the same time, has a prior claim to property on the bride's side by virtue of a contribution to the bride's father in the previous generation. In other words, this prior exchange—denoting the same-sex sibling relationship of parents—would emphasize the sibling status of the prospective couple and de-emphasize their cross-cousin status. Had this parental sibling relationship not been activated by a marriage payment contribution (e.g., had it been a distant kin tie or had it simply been forgotten), and assuming the couple were members of different clans (usually necessary), then, in all likelihood, the marriage would have been allowed. Thus, given the potential for overlapping and contradictory affinal and consanguineal relationships, the record of actual marriage exchanges clarify ambiguous social statuses by emphasizing particular ties over others.

The centrality of marriage in Maneo makes it a useful set of practices and beliefs to examine in order to assess broader social and historical processes. This is particularly so since I had heard on my first trip in 1989 that marriage payments themselves are changing. According to an informant from the coast, cash (up to US\$1500) is replacing traditional valuables—16th- and 17th-century porcelain, brass gongs, and iron gun barrels—still in circulation in the mountains. If so (and for the purposes of the grant proposals I was writing at the time, I assumed it was), then I could test to see whether changes in the content of marriage payments is resulting in changes in the form of the exchanges—in the manner in which payments are mobilized, distributed, and exchanged. Variation in exchange patterns would, in turn, indicate broader morphological changes in the structure of Maneo society. I assumed also that marriage makes manifest a system of gender- and age-based inequalities (Collier 1988). Thus, I proposed, the precipitating cause of this transformation would lie with the perceived vulnerability of the existing structure of authority. That is, elders would be changing the form of marriage payments as a strategy to preserve their privileged position in society threatened by the loss of traditional valuables (due to sale and breakage.) Support for this argument would come from showing that the sociology of cash exchanges in marriage negotiations mirrors that established by the exchange of traditional valuables, with respect to elder control over the distribution and allocation of marriage gifts. Evidence would also emerge from the interpretation of interviews and from analysis of statistics over time on the various kinds of marriages contracted, including arranged matches, “love” marriages, and elopements. I expected the monetization of marriage exchanges on the coast to provide the opportunity for historical and comparative analysis (between coastal and mountain Maneo). However, when I returned to the field in 1992, I realized that these assumptions were unfounded and more problematic than anticipated.

A review of two relatively typical case studies illustrates some of complexities. The first marriage occurred in the fifties in the mountains.

In 1955, M’s mother arranged a marriage for her son with a woman, F, from a non-Maneo clan from a non-Maneo village (Kabohari) with previous affinal ties to her clan. (Some property was distributed at the time this marriage was arranged.) She selected F because she thought she was intelligent and hard working—a good match for her son. However, she

had two more important objectives. She wanted to re-establish this particular affinal tie and she wanted to prevent M from marrying another woman. This other woman, whom M wished to marry, had just given birth. His mother was outraged. “You’re like rain falling indiscriminately,” she said. “But you’re human and I gave birth to you, so you must obey me.” M’s father was silent, concerned that his son might poison himself if forced to marry another woman. His mother insisted, however. She even slashed M’s leg with a knife. At the time, M knew only that a match had been arranged, he did not yet know the identity of his prospective bride. On passing through F’s village he was invited to eat at her parent’s house. A seat was left open next to her. The hosts said, “Don’t run. Here she is.” He spent one night with her and returned home the next day saying he would be right back. Instead he fled to the forest. In the meantime, his mother, father, and sister’s husband went to F’s village and returned with her to Maneo. Realizing there were no alternatives (and unwilling to risk eloping with his girlfriend), M conceded and moved back in with his parents and new wife. In 1957, property was exchanged for this marriage on the first of two formal occasions called *ha-hapina*. Supposedly, 75 pieces of property—mostly porcelain and gongs (one third of which consisted of “named” pieces, the most highly prized)—were distributed from his side to his bride’s. These items came from his parents and directly from his sister who had just married. (The bride’s side gave cloth and arm bracelets and hosted the party in return.) Later, as promised, a second ceremony was held after the marriage of another sister and just after the death of M’s parents. The 25 additional pieces of property in this distribution came from paternal uncles.

This second marriage took place in one of the coastal villages in 1993.

F, who had just finished SMP (Junior High School), had two suitors, H and another young man from a nearby (non-Maneo) coastal village. Her father and mother preferred H. While H is a very likeable fellow, their preference reflected other considerations as well. Both candidates were poor, but H, with numerous relatives to call on, appeared to have the better chance of obtaining property with which to marry F (literally “to compensate her parents for the cost of raising her”). In addition, F’s younger brother would need property from her marriage if he hopes to marry properly—that is, reside patrilocally and keep his children. He has no other sisters. (Their parents never mentioned a “need” or “desire” to renew an affinal alliance.) For her part, F seemed indifferent to her family’s interests. She continued both relationships. Then, immediately after F’s father chased the other suitor out the window of her bedroom (fleeing

in such haste he left his sandals), H promptly departed for the mountains to solicit property from his mother and maternal uncles. (He has no biological sisters and his father—an only child—is dead.) H gave F's parents a gong and immediately moved in. The marriage was made public when the couple and her father began to process sago together. F's father has asked H for two named pieces of property, one called *pinalaelaesa*, which used to be relatively common in Maneo, and another, a *kotalalin*, which was more common in Manusela and Kabohari. He asked for the latter to "replace" the *kotalalin* he had given his own brother-in-law thirty years earlier. Recognizing the scarcity of porcelain, he told H he would accept cash instead (roughly US\$150 per object). Unfortunately, most of the property that H's mother had stored or had access to from her second marriage (and from the marriages of her sisters) had been given to H's older brother when he had married. Presently, the young couple reside with F's parents on the coast in a state of probationary marriage called *kapia* or *kawin piara*. Since marrying, H has given some cash (US\$10) and four more pieces of property (none of which are the named pieces his father-in-law had asked for).

Several conclusions can be drawn from these and other case studies collected so far. First, marriage does not generate obvious social inequalities along the lines of gender and age that I had proposed. Unlike the first case study, children typically cooperate with their parents (even in arranged matches), and older women usually take an active role in promoting (or obstructing) the marriages of their children. Second, there are no significant regional differences in Maneo marriage practices despite the fact that 40 kilometers of uninhabited rugged terrain separates the relatively isolated mountain villages from the coastal communities. Mountain Maneo come down to the coast to help harvest cloves; coastal people venture to the mountains to eat durian and jackfruit, look for birds, and gather *gaharu* (an aromatic resin sold and processed for incense). Most families have close relatives in both regions whom young men visit when they need marriage valuables. Third, the historic changes in marriage practices are less dramatic than anticipated. To be sure, there are differences, some of which will provide a basis for comparison. For example, the decline in the availability of marriage payments has meant that far more of the offspring of younger couples join their maternal clans than in the past. Yet marriage practices since the 1940s have been remarkably consistent. As in the past, young men obtain gifts from parents and sisters, and parents, for their part, still attempt (though with less

success, I believe) to influence the marriage decisions of their children. Porcelain and other valuables are used in contemporary marriages despite the fact that quantities are dwindling. Cash is accepted—the wife-givers (*hahamana*) often ask their wife-takers (*hahapina*) for money—yet most persons are unwilling to receive cash in lieu of porcelain (F's father in the second case study being one exception). Cash and traditional marriage valuables mean different things and their meanings reflect differences in their respective exchange values. Nevertheless, shifts in meanings and changes in practices may well occur by the time the next generation marries. One indication of change comes from the fact that up until the 1960s marriages were almost all celebrated with a *hahapina* ceremony. This ceremony—which includes dancing, singing, and feasting—is hosted by the bride's side and is intended, symbolically, to challenge the guests. The guests, in response, display their marriage gifts. Now, however, this celebration rarely occurs, and when wealth is distributed it is done so clandestinely. If the experience of mobilizing and distributing marriage payments (and of marrying itself) affects young couples differently from the way the experience affected their parents a generation earlier, then, I suspect, changes in marriage practices and in the meaning of those practices will become even more apparent in the next generation.

What can one say about the data in light of the need to reformulate the original research design? One obvious impression emerging from the case studies is that the circumstances surrounding each marriage are unique. Circumstances influencing marriage outcomes include family composition (the ratio of same-sex to cross-sex siblings, the birth order and marital status of family members), the history of prior marriages and exchanges, and the clan status of various parties involved. As in the marriages described above, these factors matter. In the first case study, M had enormous resources from sisters who had married as well as from being the first of his parents' sons to marry. For that reason, perhaps, his mother wished to, and was able to arrange a prestigious match. In the second case study, H has far less wealth yet greater autonomy in his marriage choices. These differences are not directly related to the location of their respective marriages nor to the era the marriages took place. Differences in marriage outcomes, instead, reflect a certain latitude in the interpretation and application of marriage procedures. One man, for example, insists that his daughters' marriages be completed with five

prized pieces of porcelain each—an unusually high demand. He recalls the amount of property contributed for his own marriage as justification. If his affines are not able to come up with the requisite amount (and none so far have), then each of the daughters' families will have to reside matrilocally and all the grandchildren will devolve matrilineally. Most parents are less demanding, typically "pulling" just one child to the mother's side if payments are incomplete. Another elder, disgusted by the marriage of his sister to his own brother-in-law (a violation of the principle that one should not directly receive the gifts one gives), did not press claims to valuables or to the couple's offspring. Yet this same elder, along with his wife, still feel an obligation to fulfill this brother-in-law's continued demands for property or children. They even consider transferring a child from their eldest daughter's family.

Differences in marriage strategies and outcomes are the result of competing interests and values. There are no explicit standards to cite in mediating marriage disputes. Moreover, there are no courts—only in the most volatile of cases will elders convene to attempt to settle a matter. (It is recognized that parties, not necessarily individuals, enter into marriages on their own accord. Thus, they are free to withdraw or negotiate as they see fit.) Instead, standards of appropriateness guide participants in marriage negotiations. A good marriage, one conforming to the matrilineal cross-cousin pattern and publicly affirmed by the exchange of valuables, generates prestige. This prospect in tandem with the threat of opprobrium (or worse) should, ideally, curb base desires that might otherwise lead to bad marriages. (Note that bad marriages are not synonymous with love marriages.) Thus, I was informed, sister-exchange marriages (described above) did not occur in the past because people were too ashamed. Likewise, people said, perpetrators of the more serious offense, marrying "incestuously" (of which there were at least four recognized cases at the time of our fieldwork) would have been killed in the past. These remarks may be meant to assuage our (the field worker's) anticipated moral condemnation; they may also be an attempt to mollify a collective shame by recalling that at least there was a time in which marriages conformed to an appropriate standard. Yet, the comments of informants may also reflect a depth of historical truth. Prestigious marriages confirm long-standing alliances between subsegments of different clans. These alliances, I believe, are declining in importance and declining as a source of prestige. The spread of Christianity

(beginning early this century) and the growing influence of the state (particularly since the end of the RMS separatist movement), has diminished threats of interclan raids and obviated at least some of the need for contracting political alliances. Prestige may now be pursued in earnest through other avenues made possible by the expansion of the market economy (i.e., through prospects of earning cash and purchasing goods, particularly on the coast.) Without some of the conditions that once lent urgency to the renewal of marriage alliances, marriage may no longer be the area of strategic concern it once was. Thus, parental involvement in the marital decisions of their children—an ongoing phenomenon—may reflect personal sentiments, such as concern for the “fitness” of the prospective spouse and consideration of marriage-payment demands. Individuals may be relatively free to contract their own “love” marriages (*suka dengan suka*) provided they do not violate principles of incest and sister-exchange. Further collection and analysis of oral histories and marriage case studies should shed light on these and other issues.

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